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ABSTRACT

A counseling analogue study was designed to evaluate the effects of counselor ethnicity and counselor trustworthiness on American Indian student ratings of perceived counselor "trustworthiness." Forty-four American Indian high school students (22 males and 22 females) from a public high school on a reservation in Nebraska viewed a 2-segment videotape analogue of 2 counseling interviews in which an American Indian student discussed a problem about future educational plans. Four conditions were portrayed by two male interviewers (Indian and non-Indian) and typified trustworthy and untrustworthy interview performance. Subjects then rated the counselors' perceived levels of trustworthiness on the Counselor Effectiveness Rating Scale and the Counselor Rating Form. Results indicated that the role manipulation of trustworthy interview behaviors was successful and that the ethnicity of the counselor may not be important provided that the non-Indian counselor is trained to use culturally appropriate interview communicative and trustworthy behaviors. With this information counseling psychologists with training responsibilities should be better able to provide practice for students in training in identifying and enacting verbal and non-verbal behaviors indicative of counselor trustworthiness with American Indian clients. (Author/NEC)

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American Indian Perception of Trustworthiness in a Counseling Interview

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ABSTRACT

A counseling analogue study was designed to evaluate the effects of counselor ethnicity and counselor trustworthiness on American Indian student ratings of perceived counselor "trustworthiness." Forty-four American Indian high school students viewed a two-segment videotape analogue of two counseling interviews in which an American Indian student discussed a problem about future educational plans. Four conditions were defined by (a) two male interviewers (Indian and non-Indian); and (b) trustworthy and untrustworthy interview performance. Subjects then rated the counselors' perceived level of trustworthiness on the Counselor Effectiveness Rating Scale and the Counselor Rating Form. Results indicated that the role manipulation of trustworthy interview behaviors was successful.

AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF TRUSTWORTHINESS IN A COUNSELING INTERVIEW

Trustworthiness and interpersonal trust have been the subject of literature concerning counselor-client and minority-majority group relations for quite some time (Roll, Schmidt, & Kaul, 1972; Strong & Dixon, 1971; Strong & Schmidt, 1970; Williams, 1974; Wright, 1975). Difficulties in race relations are frequently related to the expectancies of one group that the verbal statements of the other group cannot be trusted (Rotter, 1967). Rotter (1980) recently discussed differences in high and low truster's willingness to trust a stranger when there is no clear data. His statements may be applied to differential expectations in the initial stages of minority-majority interpersonal relationship formation as follows: Whereas a majority group member may enter a relationship with an attitude of trusting the other until clear evidence that the person cannot be trusted surfaces; a member of the minority group frequently enters the relationship suspending trust until the person proves that he/she is worthy of being trusted.

Trustworthiness is of particular importance in counseling, for counseling is a process in which the disclosure of information relevant to the client's concern is vital. Proponents of the social influence model have verified that the higher the levels of perceived counselor expertness, attractiveness, and trustworthiness, the more likely the client will self-disclose personally threatening material and allow himself or herself to be influenced toward positive attitude or behavior change (Strong & Dixon, 1971).

The failure to self-disclose and to trust others has been cited as a barrier to effective counseling with ethnic minority clients (Vontress, 1969). Counselor self-disclosure is cited as crucial in cross-cultural counseling situations where a feeling of "foreigness" is present between counselor and client (Henderson, 1979). Wright (1975) however, warns against generalized statements made by researchers relative to ethnic groups' perceptions of trust and satisfaction with the counseling relationship.

Authors writing in the area of counseling American Indians frequently conclude that Indians tend to value trust and understanding more than almost any counselor attribute (Bryde, 1971; Lewis & Ho, 1979; Trimble, 1976). It is further stated that American Indians may be even more sensitive to distrust than trust due to their historical heritage of ambiguous situations with the federal government in which treaties were written and broken, children were forcibly separated from the family, and decisions were made for them without their consent. Countless cases of improper communication and misrepresentation of facts have caused people involved in "helping" professions to be looked upon by American Indians as meddlesome.

LaFromboise, Dauphinais, and Rowe (1978) have verified the importance of trust for American Indian high school students but failed to identify behavioral attributes associated with perceptions of trust. They hypothesized that the length of time a counselor had been known and the amount of involvement with the student population would effect perceptions of trustworthiness. The weakness of this finding may be attributed to requesting that students focus on out-of session behaviors rather than within-session behaviors. Until specific behaviors indicative of trustworthiness are identified, training recommendations are limited to statements advocating that counselors show respect for the system, values and norms of American Indian Communities (Lewis & Ho, 1975).

The purpose of this study was to focus on within-session counseling behaviors by examining the effect of interviewer verbal and non-verbal behaviors from a previous analogue interview study (Rothmeier & Dixon, in press) when combined with culturally insincere behaviors on ratings of counselor trustworthiness with an American Indian population. Further, this study examined the effect of counselor race (Indian, non-Indian) on perceived trustworthiness. This research was conducted with the anticipation of operationally defining counselor trustworthiness and identifying cultural factors that may assist the conventionally trained Indian and non-Indian Counselor to be perceived as more trustworthy and credible by American Indian Clients.

Method

Subjects

Subjects for the study (N = 44) included 22 male and 22 female American Indian students from a public high school on a reservation in Nebraska. Students were recruited through the school administration office from the 9th through 12th grade. Ages for participants ranged from 14 to 19 years.

Subjects of this age and educational level were chosen as representative of a critical period when the choice to remain in school or drop out must be made, since this was the topic portrayed in the counseling scripts used in this study.

Videotapes

Two male doctoral students in counseling, one American Indian and one non-Indian, of comparable physical appearance were chosen by the experimenter to portray roles of counselors. The counselors received training to adequately portray both the trustworthy and untrustworthy roles similar to that of the Rothmeier & Dixon (in press) study. The untrustworthy role involved the

verbal and nonverbal conveyance of inconsistent, unconfidential, inattentive, and culturally insensitive interviewer. Limited eye contact, slouching, fidgeting, and frequent attending to a watch were behaviors in the untrustworthy role. Untrustworthiness was further achieved by the insertion of seven specific behaviors into the two interviews. Four counseling behaviors from Rothmeier & Dixon (in press) and three culturally insincere behaviors (LaFromboise, Dauphinais, & Lujan, in press) are described as follows:

(1) An abrupt topic shift - two per session - as the client becomes interested in talking about a topic the counselor quickly shifts the focus, indicating that he is not interested in discussing that issue any longer.

(2) Doggedly inaccurate paraphrasing - two per session - when the client makes a statement of some degree of importance, the counselor inaccurately paraphrases it and when corrected persists in his initial perception.

(3) Mood Change and Interest Change - one per condition - counselor conveys acceptance and interest in the client at the beginning of the first interview, and changes his response to verbally expressing indifference or impatience at the arrival of the client for the second session.

(4) Break in Confidentiality - one per condition - in the second interview, the counselor reveals that he had checked with the school principal about the accuracy of the client's perceptions of the presenting problem in a manner indicating that the client's views were subject to question.

(5) Hidden Agenda - one per condition - when discovering the client's area of interest, the counselor conveyed ulterior motives in helping

the client.

(6) Stereotypic statement - two per condition - the counselor conveyed negative attitudes or derogatory beliefs about the client's ethnic group.

(7) Broken promise - one per condition - in the first session the counselor promises to gather information vital to the client and the topic at hand, only to nonchalantly mention that he had failed to do so in the second session.

The trustworthy role was one in which the counselor was attentive and responsive to the client, gave structure and direction to the interview, and displayed respect for the client's cultural identity. Manners for the role indicated eye contact similar to that of the client, erect positioning in one's chair, reference to time only in the final minute of the session, and an aura of confident humility. The trustworthy role had the eight behaviors of (a) topic consistency, (b) accurate paraphrasing, (c) interest and mood consistency, (d) confidentiality, (e) affirmation of sincere interest through behavioral follow up, (f) cultural understanding, and (g) mutual sharing of information through self disclosures. These behaviors are consistent with the trustworthy role description and culturally appropriate behaviors suggested by Indian service providers (Dauphinais, Dauphinais, & Rowe, in press).

Training of the counselors took approximately twelve hours. The counselors had to demonstrate, by role playing, an ability to naturally insert the desired behaviors into both the trustworthy and untrustworthy roles. In addition, 20 non-Indian counselors-in-training viewed the videotaped counseling sessions, and rated the roles for trustworthiness. Verbal feedback on counselor behavior was gathered following the trial interviews.

Procedure

The experiment was conducted in the school conference room and library.

A television monitor and tape deck were on a table at the front of the room and in clear view of all of the subjects. After each of the four groups were assembled, the experimenter explained to each group of subjects that they would view two ten-minute videotaped segments of counseling sessions with an Indian high school student. They were to try to put themselves in the place of the person being interviewed and later rate the counselor on some rating scales. The two videotaped segments were shown. The experimenters then handed out booklets with instructions and rating scales to each subject. The experimenters stated that they would answer any questions as they occured in filling out the rating forms.

Instruments

Adaptations of the original Counselor Rating Form (CRF; Barak & La Crosse, 1975) and the Counselor Effectiveness Rating Scale (CERS, Atkinson, Carskaddon, and Nutsui, 1978) were used to assess subjects' perceptions of counselor effectiveness.

The CRF, a semantic differential scale, is widely used to assess perceived counselor expertness, attractiveness, and trustworthiness. For each item a bipolar adjective pair on a seven point scale (i.e. dishonest = 1, honest = 7) is presented. Fifteen items were selected (five for each characteristic - expertness, attractiveness, and trustworthiness) from the original CRF to fit more appropriately the reading level of subjects. These items were selected by the experimentors on the basis of information provided by the school principal.

The adaptation of the CERS is a similar semantic differential scale consisting of seven items related to perceived counselor credibility (expertness, trustworthiness) and utility (personal response). Subjects rated each concept on the seven point bipolar scale (bad = 1, good = 7) on the evaluative dimension of meaning.

Results

Means and standard deviations by role and counselor on the Counselor Rating Form (CRF) are presented in Table 1. A two factor analysis or variance indicated a significant role effect ($F\ \{1,40\} = 28.71$, $p < .00$) and non-significant main effect on the counselor dimension. There was also no significant interaction effect on the CRF trustworthiness dimension. There was a significant interaction effect between counselor and role on both the CRF expertness and attractiveness dimension with counselor #2 showing greater ratings differentiation between the two roles than counselor #1.

To secure additional measures of trust and expertness and information concerning counselor utility ("someone I would go to see if I had a problem") the CERS ratings were calculated. The means and standard deviations of these items are presented in Table 2. Two-way analysis of variance showed a significant role effect on the trustworthiness items - CERS 4 ($F\ \{1,40\} = 16.41$, $p < .00$) and CERS 6 ($F\ \{1,40\} = 30.56$, $p < .00$). There were no significant effects on CERS 5 (confidentiality item). There was a significant role effect on each expertness item - CERS 1 ($F\ \{1,40\} = 4.69$, $p < .04$), CERS 2 ($F\ \{1,40\} = 26.52$, $p < .00$), and CERS 3 ($F\ \{1,40\} = 14.55$, $p < .00$). CERS 7 (counselor utility) showed a significant interaction effect with counselor #2 showing greater ratings difference between the two roles than counselor #1.

Discussion

Results of the present study indicate that the Indian students clearly rated the simulated interviews more positively when the counselors enacted trustworthy roles. These results extend the findings of the Rothmeier & Dixon (in press) study of counselor perception to an American Indian setting. The demonstration that behaviors associated with perceived counselor trustworthiness can be operationalized contributes to training counselors to work effectively with Indian people. Programmatic training efforts may now go beyond emphasizing

the importance of the prospective counselor gaining awareness of Indian cultural values to the citation of specific behavioral cues indicative of trust. Although members of the counseling profession cannot remedy past social injustices or meddlesome helper contact, they can model and encourage more interpersonal trust.

Results also indicate that the ethnicity (Indian, non-Indian) of the counselor may not be important provided that the non-Indian counselor is trained to use culturally appropriate interview communicative and trustworthy behaviors. This finding lends promise to researchers who wish to generalize social influence research previously conducted with the majority population to American Indians. The authors strongly caution against generalization from this study regarding the importance of counselor ethnic similarity since the stimulus sample of counselors was limited to only one Indian counselor and one non-Indian counselor.

Generalizations of the findings of the present study to natural settings must also be tentative, for the Indian client's perception of counselor trustworthiness may not be identical to those of American Indian high school observers of simulated interview videotapes. The authors do attest however to the Indian student-observer's identification with the Indian student who acted the role of the client in the simulated interview. This student was of similar age, ethnicity and cultural reservation background and also presented a problem relevant to reservation life (i.e., completion of high school, selection of a boarding school, and experiences of racial prejudice). The Indian students were interested in the videotapes, reacted to the content of tapes, and discussed the tapes following completion of the ratings.

These findings have implications for teaching a process by which one can enhance perceived trustworthiness in interpersonal situations with Indian

clients. With this information counseling psychologists with training responsibilities should be better able to provide practice for students in training in identifying and enacting verbal and non-verbal behaviors indicative of counselor trustworthiness with American Indian clients.

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Footnotes

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Table 1

Table of Means and Standard Deviations -CRF

Role			CRF Trust.		CRF Att.		CRF Exp.	
			Co. 1	Co. 2	Co. 1	Co. 2	Co. 1	Co. 2
Trust		$\bar{\bar{X}}$	23.60	28.91	25.30	30.00	21.70	28.45
		SD	5.15	3.30	3.37	3.32	6.20	3.30
Untrust		$\bar{X}$	18.77	18.86	20.78	18.57	20.67	18.36
		SD	4.52	5.60	2.99	5.93	4.72	8.27

Table 2

Table of Means and Standard Deviations - CERS

Role			CERS 1		CERS 2		CERS 3		CERS 4		CERS 5		CERS 6		CERS 7	
			Co.1	Co.2	Co.1	Co.2	Co.1	Co.2	Co.1	Co.2	Co.1	Co.2	Co.1	Co.2	Co.1	Co.2
	Trust	X	5.00	5.55	5.60	6.09	5.00	5.45	5.50	5.73	4.70	5.54	5.70	6.45	3.60	6.09
		SD	1.25	1.04	1.35	1.22	2.06	1.63	1.51	1.01	1.83	1.75	1.83	.69	2.22	.94
	Untrust	X	3.89	4.50	3.55	3.50	3.11	3.50	4.22	3.79	4.33	4.14	4.11	3.07	3.22	2.22
		SD	1.97	1.99	1.42	1.83	1.36	1.56	1.30	1.48	2.06	1.99	1.69	1.73	2.86	1.99